# Laying down your life for one another

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

April 26, 2015

John 10:11-18 (paraphrase from NRSV)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

1 John 3:16-20 (paraphrase from NRSV)

We know love by this: he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for each other.

How does God’s love live in anyone who has more than enough, but, when they see someone in the church who needs help, they don’t help them?

Children, let’s love not just in word or talk, but in truth and action.

If we do so, we will know we are coming from a true place, and we our hearts will feel better before God whenever our hearts accuse us. God is greater than our hearts. God knows everything.

Today’s sermon will be very easy to understand. I’m not going to go into depth about things your really ought to know about the shepherd culture of ancient Israel or in the times of Jesus. That would be good, and probably build us up, but that’s not what we are about this morning. This will be one of those easy to understand, hard to do sermons.

In fact, I’m going to just use a subset of the verses from our lectionary readings: just the first verse from the gospel, and the first five verses from the epistle reading. I’m not even going to talk about Psalm 23!

And there are three simple points, and I will tell you what they are up front:

1. We should lay down our lives for each other. This is the main point.
2. When we do that well, we’ll have a stronger sense that we are coming from the same place God is coming from.
3. When we don’t do that well, we can rely on the mercy of God.

## We should lay down our lives for one another

I think it is clear that 1 John 3:16 has the parable of the good shepherd in mind. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” 1 John says: “We know love by this: he laid down his life for us.”

The word “good” in “the good shepherd” means something like “ideal” or “model.” Jesus is the model shepherd. Jesus is the ideal shepherd. In other words, if we want to know how to act as a shepherd, Jesus is the model, the ideal, the exemplar.

And Jesus mentions one quality that a good shepherd has: A good shepherd lays down their life for the sheep they care for. *He* lays down his life for his sheep. And, of course, we see that in his life, death, and resurrection. He didn’t live for himself, but for others. He literally laid down his life for us, and he was raised for us. His love for us led him to die for us.

And 1 John repeats this: We know what love is by looking at Jesus, by remembering how he died for us.

And because Jesus is a model, because we are his sheep and his followers, we must do the same: We ought to lay down our lives for one another.

What does that mean?

Let’s just say the obvious thing: sometimes it means we ought to die for one another.

In these sad days, we are seeing an increase in the public execution of Christians because of their faith. Last week brought news of two groups of Ethiopian Christians being killed in Libya by the Islamic terror group ISIS. And despite calls from some American Christians for a military response – in other words, asking the world to kill on the church’s behalf, our shepherd models laying down our lives, models putting down the sword.

And I hope this means for me, and for you, that you would be ready to literally lay down your life for God or for one another.

1 John mentions another application. Some Christians are people of some wealth. Some are not. 1 John says that laying down your life means that if you have some wealth, and see others in need, the loving thing to do is to help them out with your wealth. Jesus called this making friends with money/Mammon.

If using our money to help others is laying down your life for others, there are probably other ways, too, that we can lay down our lives for one another. In a few minutes, I’m going to pass out some index cards and ask you to brainstorm what some of these might be. So think about that.

But before I do that, let me make the other two points really quick.

## Laying down your life for others will comfort your hearts

The second point is that there is a nice side benefit to laying down your life for other people. Sometimes, we wonder if we are on the right track: are we doing what God wants? Are we in God’s will? Are we okay?

And 1 John says: Look at the evidence. Are there ways that you can see that you’ve been laying down your life for others? If so, our hearts can be comforted that we are coming from the same motivations as God. So, think about it. Has this been a characteristic of your life recently? Then praise God for that.

Of course, we don’t lay down our lives for others to feel better about ourselves; we do it for the others, not ourselves. This is just a side-benefit, but an important one.

## We won’t do enough, but God is greater than our hearts

I think 1 John must be a Mennonite letter, because the first reaction you are probably having is that you haven’t done enough. Am I right? And the letter addresses this immediately. We will never do enough to remove all doubts from our hearts. Never, never, never. God knows everything, says 1 John; he sees into all dark corners. But the good news: God is greater than our grieving hearts, and he has mercy for us.

So rather than stare too long at the state of our hearts, we should look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (as Hebrews says). We should look to our good shepherd, our ideal, our model, and love like him.

## Other examples of laying down your life for others

I’m passing out some 3x5 cards, and on one side, I’d like you to write down:

1. Die for others
2. Share wealth with others
3. [fill in the blank]
4. [fill in the blank]

Let me give you a few minutes, and we will gather these up together.

## How can you lay down your life this week?

Finally, on the other side, can you write down one or two ways you might be called to lay down your life for others this week? Also, write down, “God is greater than our hearts.”

[One or two people share; pray for all these intentions.]